

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

THE  
BEGINNINGS OF CATHOLICISM  
IN SOUTH DAKOTA

A DISSERTATION

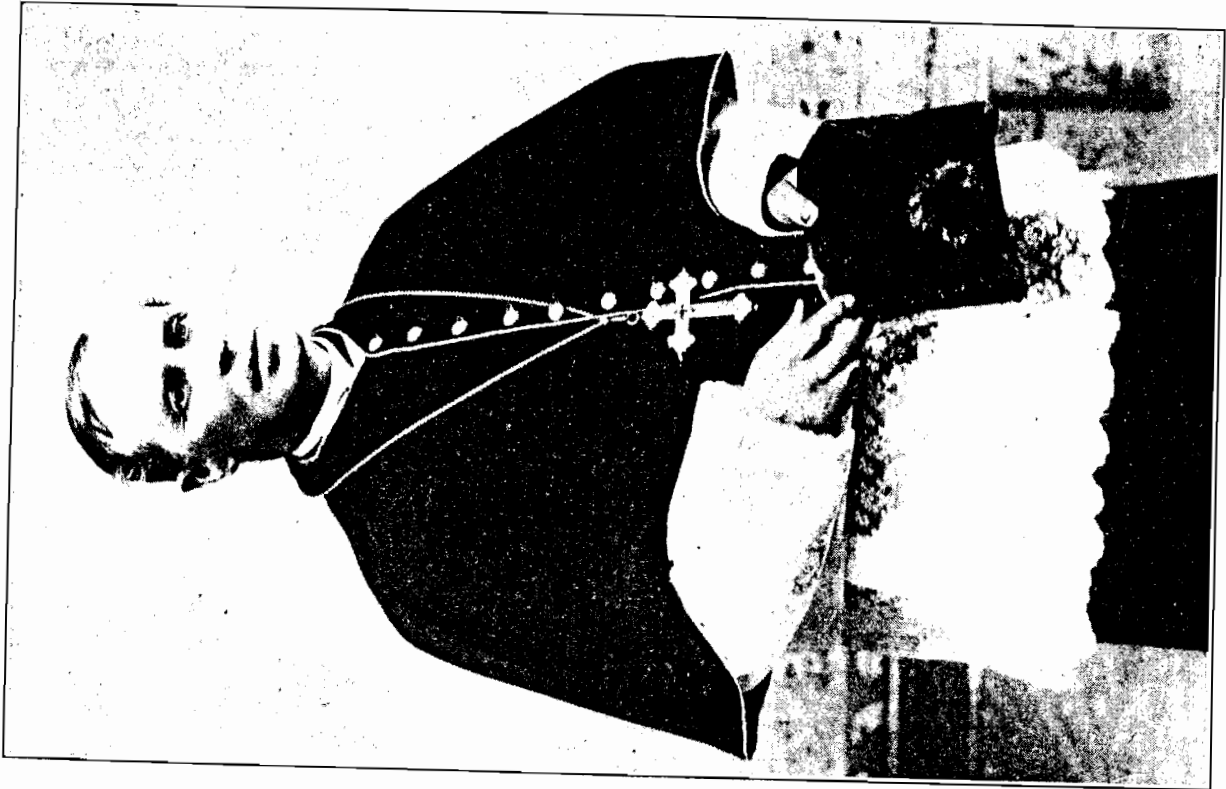
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND  
SCIENCES OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA IN PARTIAL  
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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THE MOST REVEREND MARTIN MARTY, O.S.B., D.D.,  
Abbot of St. Meinrad's Abbey, Indiana, 1871-1880; Vicar-Apostolic of  
Dakota (Consecrated Bishop of Tiberias, February 1, 1880); Bishop of  
Sioux Falls, 1889; Bishop of St. Cloud, 1894.

returned to the agency. For three or four days after the fight the plain was silent as a tomb. No human being could be spied. The only sign that there was an Indian living was the dreadful glare of burning houses on the distant horizon.<sup>121</sup>

Throughout those days of terror the mission was left unprotected. Priests, Brothers, and Sisters cared for the children and felt safe in the affection of the Indians. Could greater testimonials be given to the missionaries and the efficacy of their work?

It was unfortunate for Catholic Indians when the government undertook the establishment of non-sectarian reservation boarding schools. The Director of the Bureau of Catholic Missions summed up the situation thus:

This Government, in virtue of its declared policy in matters of religion, has made a misstep in establishing and conducting Indian boarding schools; that, by doing so, it has assumed parental duties and responsibilities; that it should not attempt to teach religion, and yet, having taken thousands of children away from their parents, it has, very inconsistently, been doing what it professes it has no right to do.<sup>122</sup>

And what were the consequences of the teaching of a strictly "non-sectarian" religion? An Indian boy, writing to his sister who was urging him to approach the sacraments, gives the answer:

I am getting to be an infidel. I'll tell why. Since I have entered the Government school, they teach various beliefs, and have various preachers come to the school, who preach this and that, and sometimes debate on other denominations, which leads me to darkness of belief, and, furthermore, they dispute against the Catholic religion, saying this and that—that the priest has no more right than a common person to hear people's faults, and by that they know the very character of a person.

<sup>121</sup> *St. Joseph's Advocate*, n.d., Letter, Jan. 15, 1891.

<sup>122</sup> *Report of the Director of Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions for 1906*, p. 47.

So I am at the point of standstill. I have not gone to confession for two years.<sup>123</sup>

Bishop Mathias C. Lenihan, of Great Falls, voiced the opinion of Catholic missionaries when he stated: "The Catholic Indian boarding schools are the only hope of the Indians today and for the future, for practicing their holy religion."<sup>124</sup> Richard Brunner, O.M.Cap., of St. Labre's Mission, Montana, added: "Permit us to say that boarding schools are the *backbone* of the mission work. Were it not for our school, much good would be left forever undone, and, we fear, many souls would never be saved."<sup>125</sup>

After Senator Vest, of Missouri, had inspected the Jesuit missions in Montana in the summer of 1883, he became a champion of Catholic mission schools:

I am a Protestant, born one, educated one, expect to die one, but I say now that the system adopted by the Jesuits is the only practicable system for the education of the Indians and the only one that resulted in anything at all.

The reason for the success of Catholic missionaries was that they devoted their whole life to the work. They were not impeded by family ties as were Protestant clergymen. Senator Vest concluded:

The Jesuits have found the secret of the system, and that is the boarding-school, industrial schools, upon the reservations, where the children are taken and where the parents are permitted to visit them once each week, but always in the presence of the fathers.<sup>126</sup>

Since the chief concern of the Catholic Church is the salvation of souls, her missionaries did not withdraw from the field of Indian education when Congress passed an interdict on the use of public moneys for denominational

<sup>123</sup> *Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, 1874-1895, Work of the Decade*, p. 28.

<sup>124</sup> *Our Negro and Indian Missions*, Jan. 1929, p. 35.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>126</sup> *Congressional Record*, 48th Cong. 1st Sess., May 12, 1884.